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Summary of Dr. Rothman's remarks:

- Support for Elder Justice Act (elder justice issues)
- Support for Positive Aging Act (mental health issues)
- Need for focus on disaster planning and recovery
- Concern for growing number of older HIV/AIDS victims
- Elevation of issues of health promotion and wellness, including examination of health disparities among minority elders
- Explore the roles of older people in an aging society

Dr. Rothman's oral remarks:

Welcome, on behalf of the Florida Council on Aging to Miami and to the early stages of our 2004 conference. I know you have many issues to focus on that you mentioned in your opening remarks, so I will just take a moment to share some current and emerging issues that warrant your attention.

Two of them are in front of us right now. There is bipartisan legislation on the Hill at the present time. One of them Bob Blancato is very familiar with, and that is the Elder Justice Act. I think that the creation of a national framework and funding to address issues of elder justice, particularly abuse, neglect and exploitation is long overdue. This issue defines how our country will respond to many of the complex and darker issues of aging in America. We should look carefully at elder justice issues. -In the same way as we look very closely at the issues of health care and transportation, we have not looked closely at how the courts are responding to issues of an aging society.

Here in Florida, we have elder justice centers in West Palm Beach (Palm Beach County) and in Hillsborough County. These justice centers are marvelous, and as we have conducted a national study this year on how courts are responding to these issues, we have found nothing that appears to be more responsive and more effective than these programs in Florida. Whether we are talking about guardianship, civil commitment, victims or offenders in criminal cases, persons involved in motor vehicle cases, families involved in civil litigation -- each court, each jurisdiction should have a plan to address the issues of aging, and I will be glad to comment further.

Other legislation that is pending is the "Positive Aging Act." Twenty percent of older adults have a mental disorder such as depression or anxiety, and we need to take a closer look at the relationship between how our mental health system and our aging networks are working together to address these issues along with other issues of addiction such as gambling.

Disaster Planning – the destruction of Hurricane Charley has attracted widespread national attention as it relates to older people. 9/11 and the ongoing series of terror alerts, not to mention potential threats of additional hurricanes, tornadoes and other natural disasters suggest that we should make disaster planning a focus of national attention, and a requirement for community plans that specifically address everything from pre-planning, preparation, education of elders, evacuation, shelters, transportation services and recovery issues including housing and support services.

Another issue on the darker side -- there has been a five-fold increase in the number of person 50 and above with HIV/AIDS during the 90's. It is conservatively estimated that there are 100,000 people with HIV/AIDS in the U.S. at this point, both those aging with the disease and contracting it in older age. There are more than 5000 in Miami Dade County - that is fully a quarter of all cases are people 50 and older.

On a more positive note, I think anything you can do to elevate these issues of health promotion and wellness consistent with Healthy People 2010 -- elevate these issues on a national level and include education, diet, nutrition and exercise. Also you need to address the most important issues of health disparities that affect minority elders in this country.

Finally, building on your opening remarks, to explore the roles of older people in an aging society. The Gerontological Society of America has a new five-year initiative to examine issues of civil engagement. I think it is very important to explore other roles that older people will and can play including in the working world, in arts and culture, in recreation and sports and in all other dimensions of life.

Thank you and I wish you best of success.